

**Written Submission to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario's
Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs**

Subject: Pre-Budget Consultations 2020

Date: January 24th, 2020



By:

The Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers (OGVG)

Mr. George Gilvesy

Chair

Dr. Justine Taylor

Science and Government Relations Manager

The Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers (OGVG) represents approximately 200 farmers responsible for over 3,200 acres of fresh, nutritious, greenhouse tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers across the province.

With farmgate sales of \$950 million in 2018, support for over 13,000 jobs, a contribution of \$1.8 billion to the economy and a consistent track record of growth, the sector is a valuable economic driver for the province. Over the past five years alone the sector has grown by 675 acres. At \$1 to \$1.5 million per acre, this investment is on par with a new auto assembly plant. The sector has a well-earned reputation for excellence and has established a significant market in the U.S. with over 70% of what our members currently produce exported.

Our sector is poised for growth and over the next five years we estimate the sector could expand by 900 acres, resulting in over \$1B in direct construction investment, an additional annual contribution of over \$520 million to the economy, and the creation of over 3,800 new jobs.

We would like to thank the current government for recognizing the importance of Ontario's agricultural sector and for initiating discussions through Minister Hardeman's agricultural roundtable to address the growing regulatory burden we have faced. It is key that we maintain and enhance our competitiveness in the global marketplace and we look to the Ontario government to be an ally in that effort. We truly believe that the Ontario greenhouse sector is seen as a shining example of success across North America and is considered best in class throughout the produce world.

Trade:

Ontario's greenhouse vegetable growers are committed to sector growth through strategic investment in both existing and emerging markets. With the majority of Ontario's greenhouse production going to the U.S. marketplace we are very pleased with the impending conclusion of the CUSMA. However, it is critical that we continue to diversify our markets to reduce reliance on the U.S. market. Establishing new marketplaces is generally a 7 to 15-year effort and OGVG would encourage the provincial government to take a long-term view of new market development by supporting trade diversification efforts over multiple years rather than the current one to two-year outlook.

Boilers:

Our sector has been working hard to address concerns raised about agricultural exemptions under the boilers and pressure vessels and operating engineers' regulations as identified by the Auditor General in 2018. During TSSA and Ministry of Government and Consumer Services (MGCS) consultations we have come to learn what specific concerns exist from a number of stakeholder perspectives. We believe we have crafted a set of proposals to address those concerns effectively and efficiently while distributing effort between the regulators and the sector. This ensures red tape is minimized while still maximizing safety outcomes. Our sector is committed to the safe and conscientious operation of our production equipment devices to ensure the safety of our workers, families and communities. We look forward to continuing to work with the government to establish smart regulations and sector-led policies.

Infrastructure

Access to natural gas, electricity, water infrastructure and increasingly sanitary sewer access is critical to ensure greenhouse sector growth and economic development. Of specific interest to the sector is the development of sanitary sewer infrastructure in the Municipality of Leamington. Access to this service will allow for the reliable disposal of excess nutrients that can no longer be used in the greenhouse, the development of on-farm housing to support a growing workforce, and the expansion of a varied and available housing stock, all of which support continued regional economic development. More critically this project will further strengthen our efforts to reduce phosphorus loading to Lake Erie, ensuring that both Ontario and Canada can meet their obligations under various agreements and strategies. Our sector is committed to this project and is looking to partner with multiple levels of government to invest private sector funds. We ask for your expertise in helping to develop creative funding solutions that effectively leverage private sector funds into projects with significant public benefit. In addition, the agricultural community is working collaboratively to address phosphorus loading and broader environmental issues through the ECO-Ag partnership. We look to government to be a key partner in these efforts.

Rugose:

The identification of the Tomato Brown Rugose Fruit Virus in many countries across the globe has caused our sector a great deal of concern and many are worried for the security of their crop, especially given increased levels of global trade. As an organization we have been working diligently on this issue since early 2019, ensuring our members had access to the most up to date information on the virus. It is critical to recognize that this pest does not pose any risk to human health and is not a risk to food safety. Recent actions by the U.S. to control the movement of fruit, seeds and seedlings into the U.S. via a Federal Order, are particularly worrisome, especially given that fruit is not considered a high-risk pathway. We want to thank OMAFRA for their support on this matter over the last year and ask for your continued support as we develop the tools necessary to effectively manage emerging community pests. Critical to those efforts is ensuring that positive behaviours such as early reporting and identification are incentivized for horticulture in same manner as seen in the livestock sector. These behaviours have proven critical to managing community animal health concerns and we believe the same approach should be taken with plant health matters.

Workforce

Access to a reliable and appropriately skilled workforce is critical to the success of any business and greenhouse production is no different. The needs of the sector are complex and will require a coordinated approach to ensure seasonal, temporary and full-time workforce channels are established. While access to an international workforce through the suite of Temporary Foreign Worker Programs is key to the continued success of greenhouse farming, we must also establish a robust employment strategy that attracts and trains a workforce capable of meeting the challenges increased innovation and automation will bring. Such a strategy should consider the potential in youth, newcomer, skilled international workers, underemployed workers and transitioning sectors to meet the increasing

demand. We would ask that the Ontario government work with the sector, in partnership with workforce development boards, settlement agencies and educational partners, to raise awareness of the potential career paths in agriculture and establish the appropriate education and skills development programs. We believe there is great potential for upskilling and micro-credentialing to ensure both existing and future workforce participants are prepared to meet the demands modern agriculture. In addition, our sector is committed to the health and well-being of our international farm workers and has established a network of resources in several communities to ensure they are supported and protected in the rural communities in which they live. This information is provided directly to the workforce through our HUB Connect App which provides a dynamic interface for community support.

BRM

Greenhouse farmers continue to feel absent from an artificially constrained Business Risk Management review process that, to date, has been a theoretical exercise that doesn't reflect the actual risk management needs and expectations of producers. Any potential program modification must be considered through the lens of producers' risk management needs, based on modern farm-level realities that vary from farm to farm and commodity to commodity. We would ask that the Ontario government works with the sector to ensure access to robust business risk management tools that are responsive, comprehensive and reflective of modern farm size.

Plastics

As single-use plastics become a more pressing issue for governments and consumers alike, it is critical that we, as a sector, identify and implement viable alternatives that are market-ready, cost-effective, and meet customer preferences. We must ensure that any alternative materials put in place are protective of both food quality and food safety. In addition, to maintain trust with Ontario's consumers, we must ensure that any alternative products have achievable end-of-life plans. We ask that the Government of Ontario work with the Government of Canada and relevant producer stakeholders to increase access to effective recycling solutions and ensure an achievable timeline is set for the transition away from single-use plastics that maintains both the quality and safety of Ontario produce.

Environmental Red Tape

As leaders in the agriculture sector in Ontario we aim to be stewards of the land and are keen to do our part to protect the environment. The majority of our members currently hold Environmental Compliance Approvals for their stormwater management facilities and/or sewage treatment facilities and are responsible for meeting compliance targets on a monthly basis. Due to the unique nature of agricultural lands, a common-sense approach to compliance and enforcement is required to ensure sampling results are meaningful and that best efforts are recognized as such. Within the agricultural domain there remain many factors which are beyond the control of farmers, such as weather patterns, soil types, overland and ground water flows, and nutrient contributions from native flora and fauna. We are all working towards a shared objective: protecting our environment, and farmers that make best efforts to do so should not be painted in the same light as those who are willful polluters, even if the regulations allow for such an interpretation. To address these concerns, we recommend that a 3rd

party agricultural ombudsmen be established to mediate a common-sense approach to compliance and enforcement. Such a role has the potential to reduce burden for both farmers and the ministry by providing a consistent, alternative pathway to enforcement in instances of low-risk impacts and miscommunication.

We thank you for this opportunity to comment and look forward to doing business in Ontario.